

Arriving, Dublin

(2014)

A blunt needle piercing
thick gray felt,
our plane drops through cloud;

below, I see a whale
passing the mouth of the bay

and then what I might expect:

ships, blue and green,
heading for open water,

islands, crops
the first houses.

Once I'm back in America
I must remember that

during my dark hours

dawn is already lighting
Dublin Harbour,

and whales swim there
like knees moving under silk.

The ghost of my lost luggage cries
in the hold of an unknown plane, its thin

arms around my boots and my two good
dresses, my laundry, art cards, my other bra,

a borrowed crystal necklace.
Or it stares from the tired shelf of an airport

room. Or it was blown up in a
concrete bunker because of the gravy

showing up liquid on a scanner.
If it was stolen, perhaps someone else

will wear my daughter's necklace, my boots,
but the other clothes - my size, my taste –

will be thrown away.
The ghost cries to me in my sleep,

waits for me anxiously. It will do this
always, even if it gets found.

That's the way it is with all our lost parts.

is a book about loss and heartbreak,
also delusion, distaste, quiet villainy, and sabotage.

There's a strong pulse of hope near the beginning,
the rhythm of which weakens as the narrative develops.

It might have some heroism.
It will have whining,

especially if there is – and there always is –
pain or vomiting involved.

It's set near the coast:
There's a running metaphor

involving rogue sea waves
and the crushing of the human spirit.

There are choices made about whom to forgive
and whom to set up in the display case near the front door,

their petty faults dusted off
whenever dislike wants justification.

It's a character-driven work,
the laziness of the protagonist

leading directly to the forfeiture of hope.
In spite of this, birds sing, babies are born, etc.

He breaks into her closet
to steal her jewelry.
He has the house hoarded up,
she tells me.
He goes through everything.
At night I can't sleep,
he talks so loud on the phone
with his girlfriend.

He hides their bank cards,
their mailbox key.

When it's safe I go over
to help her unscrew the lock
on his extra room,
but there's no time to find
her birth certificate
or social security card
in his floor-to-ceiling piles.
We fasten the lock back in
carefully.

He mocks her cancer
treatment,
tells her to *just die*.

I help plan her escape,
apply for new documents,
meet legal aid attorneys,
housing directors.

The day comes: he's out,
she has the car.
She packs frantically
with another friend
who cajoles her in the heat.

I check my paperwork,
phone the police.
We can't come out now, I'm told,
but call us again if he returns
and causes trouble.

I'm still trying to find her a
place to stay.

The women's shelter director
wants to speak to her.

No, I hear her say,
he hasn't hit me
recently.

After she says that, there's no bed
available.

The homeless shelter hotline goes
to voicemail.

She hoists her bags back upstairs fighting
with us,

unpacking again,
shouting,
Help me! Quick, quick!